

Facts about Belarus

- *A typical diet consists mainly of vegetables, meat (particularly pork), and bread.*
- *Cell phone use outnumbers landlines by nearly three times.*
- *There is no official religion yet any groups deemed a threat to the government or social order may be prohibited.*
- *A 2009 census put the population of Belarus at just under 10 million people.*
- *Over half of the working population is employed by state-run industries.*
- *The currency of Belarus is the Belarusian ruble (BYR). One US dollar is equal to approximately 14,500 rubles!*

Itinerary

Welcome to Minsk, Belarus



Geography & History

Belarus is located in Eastern Europe between Russia, Poland, the Ukraine and the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. With cold winters and cool, moist summers, the terrain is generally flat and is somewhat marshy. The nation is rich in timber and peat deposits, and has small quantities of oil and natural gas. Because it is landlocked, it has no coastline so vacationers looking for a beach experience should look elsewhere. Glacial movement has created an abundance of water sources, including over 11,000 lakes.

Belarus was part of the Soviet Union for over 70 years until gaining independence in 1991. It has since maintained close ties with Russia. Although technically a democratic republic, it is actually more of an authoritarian state led by Aleksandr Lukashenko since 1994, who has steadily increased his power while limiting personal freedoms.

Language, Culture & Religion

The primary language of Belarus is Russian, used by over 70% of the population, followed by Polish, Yiddish, and Eastern Ukrainian. Various forms of Christianity are practiced by the majority of citizens, with over 80% being Eastern Orthodox. There was once a significant Jewish population, but those numbers were diminished by the Nazi Holocaust, leaving less than 1% of the population now Jewish.

Places of Interest

National Opera & Ballet Theater of Belarus

While in Minsk, you will visit the National Opera and Ballet Theater. Opened in 1939, the current theater's original design was only partially implemented due to financial restraints and disruptions was the impending World War.

The building was renovated in 2009, with many beautiful sculptures added. It has an up-to-date sound and motion system, and the ballet company is considered one of the best in the world.

Museum of the Great Patriotic War

Minsk's best museum houses an excellent display detailing Belarus' suffering and heroism during the Nazi occupation. With English explanations throughout and a range of real tanks, airplanes and artillery from WWII, its section on concentration camps is particularly disturbing: an incredible 2.3 million people in Belarus were killed during the war, including 1.5 million civilians.

Chagall Museum

The Chagall Museum was opened in 1992 and displays collections of Chagall lithographs (his illustrations for the Bible; 1956–60), designs to accompany Gogol's *Dead Souls* (1923–25) and graphic representations of the 12 tribes of Israel (1960).

Sadly there aren't more Chagall paintings in Belarus because his work was banned by the Soviet government, which even rejected a priceless cache of paintings bequeathed to it by the artist himself.